

FACT SHEET: President Obama Protects 125 Million Acres of the Arctic Ocean

Today, President Obama designated portions of the United States' Arctic Ocean as indefinitely off limits for future oil and gas leasing. The new withdrawal – which encompasses the entire U.S. Chukchi Sea and the vast majority of the U.S. Beaufort Sea – will provide critical protection for the unique and vibrant Arctic ecosystem which is home to marine mammals and other important ecological resources and marine species, and upon which many Alaska Native communities depend. Including this action, nearly 125 million acres in the Arctic have been protected from future oil and gas activity since 2015.

Today's action comes in conjunction with Canada's announcement that it will freeze offshore oil and gas leasing in its Arctic waters, to be reviewed every five years through a climate and marine science-based assessment .

Presidential Arctic Outer Continental Shelf Withdrawal

Using his authority under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act – an authority used by Presidents of both parties to withdraw areas from oil and gas leasing, exploration, and development – the President has made the Chukchi Sea Planning Area and the vast majority of the Beaufort Sea Planning Area off limits to future oil and gas leasing to protect the fragile ecosystem of this area. This action, as recommended by Secretary Jewell, is based on several factors, each of which separately would be sufficient to support the action:

- The U.S. Arctic is a unique, vibrant, and vulnerable ecosystem that is home to several Federally listed and candidate species under the Endangered Species Act, including iconic and culturally valuable species, and upon which many Alaska Native communities rely for subsistence use and cultural traditions;
- Even recognizing the substantial steps taken by this Administration to improve the safety of potential Arctic exploration and development, there would still be significant risks associated with offshore drilling operations given that the U.S. Arctic is characterized by harsh environmental conditions, geographic remoteness, and a relative lack of fixed infrastructure and existing oil and gas operations. The consequences of an oil spill in this region could be substantially detrimental to the ecosystem;

Considering these factors, the risks associated with oil and gas activity in remote and harsh Arctic environments are not worth taking when the United States has ample energy sources near existing infrastructure elsewhere. Furthermore, while the withdrawal area does contain oil and gas resources, if oil prices remain at current levels, production of these resources would be cost-prohibitive and would not take place. Even if oil prices were more than 200 percent above their current level, production of these resources would not take place for 10-50 years because of the lead time associated with exploration and development activities.

This action is consistent with the steps the United States and the international community will take in the coming decades to transition energy systems away from fossil fuels – particularly because any potential significant Arctic offshore production would only occur around the middle

of this century, a timeline that is incongruous with our nation's need and international commitments to reduce carbon emissions.

The withdrawal would not affect a nearshore area of the Beaufort Sea, totaling 2.8 million acres, that has high oil and gas resource potential and is adjacent to existing state oil and gas activity and infrastructure. While there are significant concerns about oil and gas activity occurring in this area, it will be subject to additional evaluation and study to determine if new leasing could be appropriate at some point in the future. The five year leasing program for 2017-2022 issued by the Department of the Interior does not include lease sales in the Arctic.

Ecological Value and Fragility of the United States' Arctic

The U.S. Arctic Ocean possesses unique physical and ecological characteristics. The movement and presence of sea ice is a dominant feature of the Arctic seascape and impacts the physical, biological, and cultural aspects of life in the area. Seasonal pack ice moves south into the region during the winter months when it is dark from mid-November to mid-January. Sea ice covers the Beaufort Shelf for about nine months of the year and reaches its maximum extent in March. Landfast ice (ice that forms adjacent to and extends from the land) starts to form in October and can extend up to 25 miles from shore. The pack ice retreats during the summer, reaching its minimum extent in September. The Arctic OCS is known for its ice-associated animals, including several species of seals, Pacific walrus, polar bears, and more than 98 species of fish. Other marine mammal species, including a number of whale species, occur in the area. Many bird species are found on the shore and in the waters above the Arctic OCS, including waterfowl (e.g., eiders, long-tailed duck, and geese) and shorebirds such as the red-necked phalarope. The Beaufort and Chukchi Seas are home to several Federally listed and candidate species under the Endangered Species Act, including the bowhead whale, fin whale, Pacific walrus, polar bear, spectacled eider, and Steller's eider.¹ These two seas include extensive polar bear critical habitat designated under the Endangered Species Act.² Designated critical habitat for the threatened spectacled eider occurs on the Chukchi Sea coast of Alaska. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has designated portions of the Hanna Shoal region in the Chukchi Sea as a core use area for Pacific walrus (a candidate species for listing), known as the Hanna Shoal Walrus Use Area.³ Many of these species, including bowhead, beluga and gray whales, walrus and polar bears use large portions of the withdrawn area for feeding, resting, and migration.⁴

¹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2014. Endangered, Threatened, Proposed, Candidate, and Delisted Species in Alaska (Updated May 13, 2014). Available online at: https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/endangered/pdf/consultation_guide/4_species_list.pdf. Accessed December 9, 2016.

² 75 FR 76086. Endangered and threatened wildlife and plants; designation of critical habitat for the polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) in the United States. Available online at <https://www.regulations.gov/contentStreamer?documentId=FWS-R7-ES-2009-0042-0252&disposition=attachment&contentType=pdf>. Accessed December 9, 2016.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Marine Mammals Management. Polar bear information and maps available online at <https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/polarbear/esa.htm>. Accessed December 9, 2016.

³ 78 FR 35364. Marine mammals; incidental take during specified activities. Available online at https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/polarbear/pdf/78_FR_35364_%20June_12_2013.pdf. Accessed December 9, 2016.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service information and map of Hanna Shoal Walrus Use Area available online at https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/itr_chukchi.htm. Accessed December 9, 2016.

Jay, C.V., A.S. Fischbach, and A.A. Kochnev. 2012. Walrus areas of use in the Chukchi Sea during sparse sea ice cover. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 468:1-13.

MacCracken, J.G. 2012. Pacific walrus and climate change: observations and predictions. *Ecology and Evolution* 2(8): 2072-20890.

⁴ Clarke, J.T., M.C. Ferguson, C. Curtice, and J. Harrison. 2015. Biologically important areas for cetaceans within U.S. waters – Arctic Region. *Aquatic Mammals* 41(1): 94-103. DOI:10.1578/AM.41.1.2015.94.

The land areas adjacent to the Arctic OCS are sparsely populated, but Alaska Native communities of the North Slope depend largely on the natural environment, especially the marine environment, for food and materials. The environment is integrally linked with the cultural and spiritual values of these communities. Each year, Native communities across northern Alaska participate in a bowhead whale hunt that is central to their cultural tradition and vital for subsistence.

The recently completed 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program and accompanying Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) both highlight the unique nature of the entirety of the U.S. Arctic, while also identifying and analyzing Environmentally Important Areas (EIAs). The EIAs, developed during the analysis process for the 2017-2022 Oil and Gas Leasing Program, represent regions of especially important environmental value where there is potential for conflict between ecologically important or sensitive habitats; maintenance of social, cultural, and economic resources; and possible oil and gas development. The identification and analysis of two EIAs in the Chukchi Sea and four in the Beaufort Sea demonstrate the interconnectedness of this ecosystem, as the ecologically significant resources within the EIAs could be dramatically impacted by activities outside of those areas. The potential for broad scale impacts to the region is especially true in the case of an oil spill where the scale of impact will be enhanced due to the uniqueness of the environment and difficulties associated with spill response, mitigation, and restoration in the remote Arctic environment. Finally, many of the species and ecosystem components are not limited to the EIAs themselves, which, while examples of valuable habitat, cannot account for species migrations and potential long term shifts in species' behaviors and locations associated with climate change. Thus, although the EIAs identify and assess regions of especially important environmental value with ecologically important or sensitive habitats and/or subsistence and cultural value for the local communities, the resources within those areas are vulnerable to activities that occur outside of them and these resources exist broadly across the area being identified for withdrawal. Comprehensive protection of the area is warranted, as limiting protection to the EIAs would fail to protect ecosystem function and services critical to the region. Additionally, a larger footprint is appropriate to account for the way in which oil could spread, if a spill were to occur, as the EIAs themselves will not adequately protect important species.⁵ A brief description of the ecologically significant characteristics of the areas proposed to be withdrawn is provided below.

In addition, climate change-induced temperature increases are occurring fastest in polar regions, including the U.S. Arctic, resulting in a disproportionate amount of changes to the physical, biological, and chemical environments, such as alteration of species distribution, reduction in seasonal ice cover, and loss of permafrost. Loss of sea ice coverage reduces the available habitat

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2014. Pacific Walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus divergens*): Alaska Stock. Stock Assessment Report, revised April 2014. Available online at https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/mmm/stock/Revised_April_2014_Pacific_Walrus_SAR.pdf.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife. 2015. Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) Conservation Management Plan, Draft. U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Region 7, Anchorage, Alaska. 59 pp.

⁵ Payne, J.R., G.D. McNabb Jr., and J.R. Clayton Jr. 1991. Oil weathering behavior in Arctic environments. Pp. 631-662 IN: Sakshaug, E., C.C.E. Hopkins, and N.A. Britsland (eds.): Proceedings of the Pro Mare Symposium on Polar Marine Ecology. Trondheim. 12-16 May 1990. Polar Research IO(2).

Buist, I., R. Belore, D. Dickins, D. Hackenberg, A. Guarino and Z. Wang. 2008. Empirical Weathering Properties of Oil in Ice and Snow. Anchorage, Alaska. OCS Study MMS 2008-033. 154 pp.

Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. 2016. Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program: 2017-2022. OCS EIS/EA BOEM 2016-060. BOEM, Headquarters, Sterling, VA.

for ice-dependent species such as seals, polar bears, and Pacific walrus. Such conditions and stressors may increase the vulnerability of these species and habitat and reduce their resilience to impacts of oil and gas activities.

Chukchi Sea

The Chukchi Sea Planning Area includes important habitat for marine mammals, birds, fish, and other animals. The coastal region of this area is covered in sea ice from winter through early summer; breaks and openings in this ice provide habitat for whales migrating from the Bering Sea up into the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas during the spring and summer and back south in the fall. Walrus and ice seals use this area and are taken by Native Alaska subsistence hunters as a source of food and materials. Many species of birds follow this system of ice north from the Bering Sea into the Arctic waters and inland to habitats along the North Slope. During the summer, walrus use the coastal and offshore areas of the Chukchi Sea extensively as they move between the coast and the areas where they feed in the vicinity of the existing Hanna Shoal Presidential Withdrawal area. There are areas of designated “essential fish habitat” within the Chukchi Sea Planning Area and large portions of the Chukchi have been designated as critical habitat for the polar bear under the Endangered Species Act.

Two EIAs were identified in the 2017-2022 Five Year Program PEIS, the Walrus Foraging Area and the Walrus Movement Corridor. The Walrus Foraging Area EIA surrounds the current Hanna Shoal Presidential Withdrawal and includes the FWS-designated Hanna Shoal Walrus Use Area (HSWUA); the Walrus Movement Corridor EIA includes an area between the Hanna Shoal Presidential Withdrawal and the existing Chukchi Corridor Presidential Withdrawal and captures portions of the area walruses use to transit from nearshore and onshore haul out areas and feeding areas in and around the existing Hanna Shoal Presidential Withdrawal. The FWS HSWUA designation is based on walrus tagging studies conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey that have tracked walrus movements and identified foraging and resting habitat. The Foraging Area includes habitat that is critical for the Pacific walrus, including areas of high benthic biomass within shallow waters where sea ice persists into the summer. Walruses forage in this area from June to October and can occur in high numbers. This area also includes areas of high biological productivity that serve the foraging needs of other marine mammals.⁶ These EIAs underscore the vulnerability of the Chukchi Sea Planning Area and while withdrawing these areas alone would help protect some ecological resources, it would not reduce all risks to these important areas. Fully protecting these areas, the migration pathways between them, and accounting for long term shifts as a result of climate change will ensure that the EIAs, the previous Chukchi Sea Presidential Withdrawal, and areas critical to essential marine life and subsistence activities will be protected from risks associated with mineral leasing.⁷

⁶ Jay, C.V., et al. 2014:1-13.

⁷ Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. 2016. Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program: 2017-2022. OCS EIS/EA BOEM 2016-060. BOEM, Headquarters, Sterling, VA. Chapter four.

Nuka Research and Planning Group, LLC and Pearson Consulting. 2010. Oil spill prevention and response in the U.S. Arctic Ocean: Unexamined risks, unacceptable consequences. Report to Pew Environment Group. Available online at http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/oceans_north_legacy/page_attachments/oil-spill-prevention.pdf. Accessed December 9, 2016.

Robertson, T.L., Campbell, L. K., Pearson, L., and Higman, B. 2013. Oil spill occurrence rates for Alaska North Slope crude and refined oil spills. Prepared by Nuka Research & Planning Group, LLC. OCS Study, BOEM 2013-205. Seldovia, AK: USDO, BOEM Alaska OCS Region.

Beaufort Sea

The Beaufort Sea Planning Area encompasses habitat for many of the same species found in the Chukchi Sea. Bowhead and beluga whales use the shelf and shelf break waters of the Beaufort extensively throughout the year. Ice seals and polar bear use nearshore and offshore habitats as they rest, feed, and reproduce, often following the movement of the ice as it expands in the winter and retreats during the summer. A variety of bird species use the Beaufort Sea year-round, including seabirds that forage offshore and shorebirds that “stage” here as they begin their fall migration. Large portions of the Beaufort Sea Planning Area and adjacent waters are designated critical habitat for polar bears. There is also designated “essential fish habitat” throughout the area. Subsistence hunting takes place in many communities along the Beaufort coast, from Kaktovik in the east to Barrow, Alaska.

The Barrow Canyon EIA is an important migration and foraging area for beluga whales, bowhead whales, gray whales, and many species of birds.⁸ Several studies show that beluga and bowhead whales use this area preferentially, particularly in the fall; bowhead whales have high relative residence times in the area during their westward migration.⁹ The southern portions of the Barrow Canyon EIA encompass relatively high densities of birds during summer (June to September), including brant geese and king eider.¹⁰ The EIA encompasses areas of high benthic biomass and high productivity, likely driving the associated occurrence of marine mammals and birds. The Barrow Canyon EIA lies offshore to the east of Point Barrow at the nexus of the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas. The presence of marine mammals in this area makes it important for subsistence hunting.

The Camden Bay EIA is important ecologically and for subsistence use.¹¹ The Camden Bay area is important to bowhead whales, beluga whales, and for seal feeding, and is also an important bowhead whale hunting area in the fall.¹² This area was shown to be a “hotspot” for both marine mammals and seabirds.¹³

⁸ Stafford, K.M., et al. 2016.

Clarke, J.T., et al. 2015.

Kuletz, J., et al. 2015. Hauser, D. D., K. L. Laidre, R. S. Suydam, and P. R. Richard. 2014. Population-specific home ranges and migration timing of Pacific Arctic beluga whales (*Delphinapterus leucas*). *Polar Biology*: 1-13.

Wong, S.N.P., C. Gjerdrum, K.H. Morgan, and M.L. Mallory. 2014. Hotspots in cold seas: The composition, distribution, and abundance of marine birds in the North American Arctic. *Journal of Geophysical Research Oceans* 119:1691-1705.

⁹ Stafford, K.M., et al. 2016.

Citta, J.J., L.T. Quakenbush, S.R. Okkonen, M.L. Druckenmiller, W. Maslowski, J. ClementKinney, J.C. George, H. Brower, R.J. Small, C.J. Ashjian, L.A. Harwood, and M.P. Heide-Jørgensen. 2015. Ecological characteristics of core-use areas used by Bering-Chukchi Beaufort (BDB) bowhead whales, 2006-2012. *Progress in Oceanography* 136: 201-222.

Clarke, J.T., et al. 2015.

Kuletz, J., et al. 2015. Hauser, D. D., K. L. Laidre, R. S. Suydam, and P. R. Richard. 2014. Population-specific home ranges and migration timing of Pacific Arctic beluga whales (*Delphinapterus leucas*). *Polar Biology*: 1-13.

¹⁰ Drew, G. F. and J. Piatt. 2013. North Pacific Pelagic Seabird Database (NPPSD) v2. US Geological Survey Alaska Science Center & US Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, AK. Available online at <http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/nppsd/index.php>. Accessed December 9, 2016.

Walker, N. J. and M. A. Smith. 2014. Alaska Waterbird Database v1. Audubon Alaska, Anchorage, AK.

Kuletz, J., et al. 2015.

USFWS. 2016. At-Sea Surveys of Seabirds from Ships of Opportunity. USFWS, Anchorage, AK.

¹¹ Huntington, Henry P. 2013. Traditional Knowledge Regarding Bowhead Whales and Camden Bay, Beaufort Sea, Alaska. August 5, 2013.

¹² Wolfe, R.J. 2013. Sensitive tribal areas on the Arctic slope: An update of areas, issues, and actions in four communities. Prepared by R.J. Wolfe for the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, Barrow, AK.

¹³ Kuletz, J., et al. 2015.

The Kaktovik EIA captures areas of important habitat for bowhead whales during their fall migration when they are travelling near shore; the eastern portion of the EIA overlaps with marine mammal “hotspots”.¹⁴ The EIA overlaps areas where subsistence hunters target bowhead whales in the fall. The portion of this EIA that lies to the west of the existing Presidential Withdrawal is important habitat for brant geese, while the eastern side captures habitat for red-throated loon. Both of these areas show persistent, long-term, high density of bird occurrence.¹⁵ Many polar bear dens have been identified in this area over the past century, and this area of the Beaufort Sea coast is expected to remain important denning and feeding habitat areas for polar bears during the winter as the sea ice extent continues to change.¹⁶

The fourth EIA analyzed in the 2017-2022 Program is Cross Island. The portion of the Cross Island EIA that does not overlap with the high resource potential area and is not in close proximity to existing infrastructure is being withdrawn.

The proposed withdrawal areas in the Beaufort Sea will serve as a refuge for the animals that use the waters of the Arctic OCS and protect the interconnected components of this ecosystem, including the EIAs and migration pathways between them as well as accounting for potential shifts in critical habitat as the ecosystem continues to shift in the face of climate change.

Oil Spill Risks

The U.S. Arctic is ice-covered for eight to nine months of the year, with almost complete darkness for nearly three months. The nearest U.S. Coast Guard air base in Kodiak, Alaska and the nearest major port in Dutch Harbor, Alaska are both approximately 1,000 miles away.

Oil spill response and clean-up raises unique challenges in the Arctic. While there is a substantial knowledge base on oil spill response gained from experiments, research, and practical experience responding to spills, much of the work has been done in temperate climates.¹⁷ Lower water temperatures or sea ice will slow down or eliminate the processes that control oil weathering, such as evaporation and natural dispersion. A large spill occurring on or under ice would be trapped and persist until the ice melted, allowing trapped oil to disperse. Volatile components of the oil would be more likely to freeze into the ice rather than dissolve or disperse into the water column. In addition, seasonally limited daylight can be a major issue for oil spill response during freeze up, and over the winter. The impacts could be major to subsistence uses, birds, mammals, and other sea life. An oil spill during periods of restricted open water could have severe effects,

¹⁴ Clarke, J.T., M.C. Ferguson, C. Curtice, and J. Harrison. 2015. Biologically important areas for cetaceans within U.S. waters – Arctic Region. *Aquatic Mammals* 41(1): 94-103. DOI:10.1578/AM.41.1.2015.94.

Kuletz, J., et al. 2015.

¹⁵ Drew, G. F. et al. 2013.

Audubon Alaska. 2014. Important Bird Areas by Type. Available online at http://docs.audubon.org/sites/default/files/documents/alaska_ibas_type_20aug2014.pdf. Accessed August 18, 2016.

Walker, N. J., et al. 2014.

¹⁶ Durner, G. M., D. C. Douglas, R. M. Nielson, S. C. Amstrup, T. L. McDonald, I. Stirling, M. Mauritzen, E. W. Born, O. Wiig, E. DeWeaver, M. C. Serreze, S. E. Belikov, M. M. Holland, J. Maslanik, J. Aars, D. C. Bailey, and A. E. Derocher. 2009. Predicting 21st century polar bear habitat distribution from global climate models. *Ecological Monographs* 79:107-120.

Durner, G.M., Fischbach, A.S., Amstrup, S.C., and Douglas, D.C. 2010. Catalogue of polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) maternal den locations in the Beaufort Sea and neighboring regions, Alaska, 1910–2010: U.S. Geological Survey Data Series 568, 14 p.

¹⁷ “Responding to Oil Spills in the U.S. Arctic Marine Environment,” Committee on Responding to Oil Spills in the U.S. Arctic Marine Environment, The National Research Council of the National Academies, 2014.

as whales such as the bowhead and beluga use open water areas in the ice during their migrations and would concentrate within these areas in the spring. An oil spill in the Arctic creates substantial challenges for clean up and current techniques have not been proven when oil is mixed with ice or trapped under ice. Additionally, unlike the Gulf of Mexico, logistical support in the Arctic region is very limited and is expected to remain limited given the remote location.

While regulatory improvement, such as the requirements for exploratory drilling in the Arctic and other business practices, have decreased the probability of an oil spill, offshore exploration and development continue to pose risks. In its analysis for the most recent lease sale in the Chukchi Sea, the Department of the Interior estimated that over the course of the 77 year life of the development scenario analyzed, there was a 75 percent chance of one or more large spills (1,000 barrels) occurring. The most recent analysis in the 2017-2022 Five Year Program PEIS found some accidental spills to be reasonably foreseeable and assumed, based on historical data and the harsh nature of Arctic conditions, that there could be up to one large spill (3,282 barrels) in each of the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas from a platform and up to four spills from pipelines (3,750 barrels) in each sea based on estimates of production volume. A substantially greater number of smaller spills, between 1 and 1,000 barrels, could also occur based on production estimates analyzed in that document. These spills could have substantial impacts on the region, particularly given the ecosystem fragility and limited available resources to respond to a spill.

Limited Oil and Gas History and Interest

While the withdrawal area does contain oil and gas resources, if oil prices remain at current levels, production of these resources would be cost-prohibitive and would not take place. Even if oil prices were more than 200 percent above their current level, production of these resources would not take place for 10-50 years because of the lead time associated with exploration and development activities.

There is a history of some lease sales in the withdrawn areas, but there has been very limited activity and industry has demonstrated its declining interest in the Arctic waters:

- Over the past 37 years, only 43 wells – six exploration wells in the Chukchi Sea and 30 exploration and seven development wells in the Beaufort Sea – have been drilled.
- The only existing offshore Federal production is from the Northstar Field in the Beaufort Sea.
- Federal offshore Arctic leases declined over 90 percent this year due primarily to relinquishments by leaseholders, from 527 in February 2016 to only 43 as of October 2016, with most of these expected to expire in 2017.

Taken together, the acreage under lease amounts to approximately 205,000 acres out of a total acreage of approximately 128 million acres in the two Planning Areas.

The withdrawal will not affect the rights of existing leases.

Lengthy Production Timeline

It is also important to note that this action is consistent with the steps the United States and the international community will take in the coming decades to reduce carbon pollution. In contrast, if lease sales were to occur and production take place, it would be at a time when the scientific realities of climate change dictate that the United States and the international community must be transitioning its energy systems away from fossil fuels.

- Even at substantially higher oil prices, production would not begin for at least 10 years following a lease sale, which could occur in the mid-to late 2030's at the earliest, and last up to 75 years.
- No infrastructure or production exists in the Chukchi Sea.
- In the Chukchi Sea, production could require 190 separate onshore pipeline miles each for oil and gas and 300 separate onshore pipeline miles for both oil and gas, requiring substantial and enormously expensive new infrastructure in sensitive places.

These timelines would only bring significant new oil and gas resources into the market at a time when the United States and its international partners must be transitioning to alternative energy sources to reduce emissions. While many agree that, during the transition to cleaner energy sources, the United States will continue to rely on oil and gas resources for some period of time, there is ample supply for that purpose in mature areas such as the Gulf of Mexico.

Building on Administration's Past Efforts

This action builds on past steps the President has taken to protect fragile ecosystems, build resilience in the face of climate change, and incorporate traditional knowledge into Arctic decision making, including:

- Creation of the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area to protect the health of the marine ecosystems of the Northern Bering Sea and Bering Strait, including making 40,300 square miles off limits from oil and gas leasing.
- Designation of areas of the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas as off limits from oil and gas leasing based on their ecological value and importance to Alaska Native subsistence users.
- Designation of the waters of Bristol Bay, known for its world-class fisheries and stunning beauty, as off limits to oil and gas activity.
- Convening of the White House Arctic Science Ministerial, including hosting more than 30 Alaska Native leaders and representatives from five Indigenous organizations from across the Arctic to share their concerns and priorities on how to respond to Arctic-science challenges; strengthen Arctic observations and data-sharing; expand regional resilience; and incorporate Arctic science in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.